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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: FORMER OPPOSITION LEADER ON PRESIDENT'S THIRD
TERM; SECURITY IN THE NORTH

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CLASSIFIED BY: J. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. During a September 8 meeting with the Ambassador, the head of the former opposition party Front for the Restoration of Democracy and Unity (FRUD)-and currently President Guelleh's most important ruling coalition partner-laid out the FRUD's cautious approach to the question of a possible third term for Guelleh, as well as his concern over sporadic security incidents involving youth in the capital and armed Afar groups in northern Djibouti. While urging immediate action to mitigate regional disparities and address the root causes of youth discontent, he also stressed the GODJ's continuing willingness to engage in peaceful dialogue with any disaffected groups. In addition, he acknowledged but could not/not confirm press reports that exiled Djiboutian political and economic leaders-possibly with some assistance from Eritrean elements-may be involved in fueling security incidents in Djibouti. On the question of a constitutional revision to allow President Guelleh to run for a third term, he said that the FRUD was waiting for extensive intra-coalition negotiations, and would press for any constitutional amendment to go to a national referendum. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Djibouti's carefully-constructed, five-party ruling coalition consists of President Guelleh's own RPP (People's Rally for Progress), the former opposition party FRUD, and three smaller parties. Within this constellation, the predominately ethnic Afar FRUD likely represents the most serious counterweight to RPP dominance. The current FRUD evolved from an armed group which clashed with the predominately ethnic Somali-led GODJ during the 1990s; FRUD Party President Ali Mohamed Daoud, known as "Jean Marie," played a key role in the negotiations which put an end to this period of armed conflict. The FRUD joined the ruling UMP (Union for a Presidential Majority) coalition in 1999, and currently holds 12 of 65 parliamentary seats. Daoud captured national attention in March, when he delivered a speech sharply critical of the GODJ in the National Assembly. Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita reacted strongly to the speech, which he interpreted as an ad hominem attack. The editor of the national state run newspaper "La Nation" was ousted shortly after he purportedly gave more favorable coverage to "Jean-Marie's" speech than to the Prime Minister's rebuttals (ref A).

SOME "RETICENCE" ON A THIRD TERM

13. (C) Daoud told Ambassador that the FRUD has not yet taken an official position for or against a constitutional revision allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in 2011. Yet despite this official silence, Daoud said, many within the party were "reticent" to support such a change, and felt that twelve years in office (the span of the two normal presidential terms currently allowed under the Djiboutian constitution) was "enough." Daoud said that the FRUD was waiting for there to be extensive consultations within the UMP coalition on the question of a third term. Celebrations in early 2009 for the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the RPP and President Guelleh's tenth year in office were marked with "popular demands" from rank-and-file RPP members that the constitution be revised to allow a third term (ref B). If the RPP had perhaps hoped that its coalition UMP partners would follow this example and make public calls for a third term, Daoud commented, such support had not materialized. RPP's public messaging sought to paint Guelleh as the only possible candidate. However, without mentioning specific names, Daoud told Ambassador that there were a handful of other viable presidential candidates both within the RPP and among the coalition partners.

14. (C) If the decision is made to attempt a constitutional revision, Daoud said that the FRUD would push strongly for this revision to be approved by referendum, rather than by National Assembly vote. (NOTE. Djibouti's constitution stipulates that

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amendments require both a majority vote of the National Assembly, and a majority vote in a national referendum. However, the President also has the right to decide not to bring an amendment to referendum. If the President invokes this option, a two-thirds majority vote in the National Assembly is required. END NOTE). Furthermore, echoing what other GODJ officials have previewed, Daoud said that any such revision would likely include other reforms. Additional proposed constitutional amendments are still under discussion within and among the parties, but some ideas include the creation of a vice-president and the establishment of a senate.

YOUTH DISCONTENT IN DJIBOUTI CITY;

FEELING LEFT BEHIND IN THE REGIONS

15. (C) On a recent upswing of incidents of stone-throwing, vandalism, and other forms of youth violence in Djibouti's poorer urban neighborhoods, Daoud named unemployment and extreme poverty as the root causes. Echoing his controversial March speech to the National Assembly, Daoud said that economic progress in Djibouti had not benefitted all equally, and that there was a real risk of Djibouti turning into a "two speed society." (NOTE: Other GODJ officials, including the acting Prefect of Djibouti City, have largely concurred with Daoud's assessment, attributing the unusual surge in violence less to political pressures or ethnic tensions than to poverty, unemployment, and an acute lack of productive leisure time activities for young people. END NOTE). A significant number of youths had been brought before the judicial system for their involvement in such episodes, Daoud said. (NOTE: A Deputy State Prosecutor recently told EmbOffs that around 72 youths had been jailed in connection with the recent incidents. Both the Deputy Prosecutor and the Prefect of Obock also told EmbOffs that the GODJ was considering imprisoning such offenders at a newly renovated facility in the northern city of Obock, far removed from Djibouti City. END NOTE).

16. (C) Daoud said that Djibouti's rural regions felt left out of the country's recent economic growth, as major new investments were made predominately in Djibouti City. The promised decentralization process was underway, but not complete, he added. Regional Councils existed "theoretically," but lacked real resources. The UMP needed to address this situation immediately, he said, or face "complications."

SECURITY INCIDENTS IN NORTHERN DJIBOUTI

17. (C) In response to recent security incidents in northern Djibouti-including at least two mine incidents (ref C)-Daoud said that while people speculated about what might have occurred, little was yet public or "visible." He confirmed what he characterized as an "ambush" of government troops by an armed group in the Mabla mountains northwest of the town of Obock approximately two weeks ago, but had few details. He said the government had increased patrols in the area, which he believed would lead to more encounters between the army and these armed groups.

18. (U) The human rights/opposition website ARDHD (Association for the Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti) and the website "Middle East Online" reported a clash in late August between the Djiboutian Armed Forces (FAD) and "rebels" in the Mabla mountains. According to the Middle East Online report, a spokesman for an armed branch of the FRUD claimed that they had been attacked by FAD forces using two helicopters, but had rebuffed the offensive, killing four FAD soldiers and wounding twenty others. (COMMENT. In Djibouti's

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small society, both rumors and real information spread quickly. It would be nearly impossible to keep twenty injuries and four deaths among FAD forces quiet. Therefore, given the relative silence of the rumor mill, it is likely that the purported "FRUD-Armed Branch" claims on the most recent clash may be at the least exaggerated. (END COMMENT).

19. (C) Information from Djiboutian military sources has been sparse. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) reports that FAD liaison officer to CJTF-HOA acknowledged that there had been an exchange of fire in the Mabla mountains, but that the actual scale of the incident was relatively minor-not a major skirmish. In a separate discussion with the Ambassador September 10, Djiboutian FAD Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Zakaria Cheick Ibrahim acknowledged an incident in the Mabras, but ascribed it to a small band of "malfaiteurs" (criminals). Republican Guard Commander Colonel Mohamed Djama insisted those responsible for recent security incidents were not even Djiboutian, but instead were "Eritrean infiltrators," although Major General Zakaria quickly added that there were likely "one or two Djiboutians" among them as well.

110. (C) Daoud said that it was difficult to confirm press reports that other political forces-for example, exiled businessman Abdourahman Mahmoud Boreh (ref D)-might be fueling "rebel" activities. If indeed Boreh or other exiles were somehow linked to the recent security incidents, it would be easy for the GODJ to negotiate with them. Furthermore, referring to reports that Eritrea may be supporting or training anti-government elements in northern Djibouti, Daoud said that he did not/not believe that Boreh would have "gone so far" as to work with Eritrea to destabilize Djibouti. In sum, Daoud said that the FAD was now

installed in the Mablās area, and that while it was difficult to know "who to talk to," the GODJ remained ready to begin a peaceful "dialogue" with any disaffected groups. (COMMENT. In conversations with EmbOffs, regional officials and traditional leaders from Tadjourah and Obock-Djibouti's two northern districts-have in recent months largely downplayed security-related concerns linked to "rebel" activities. This approach may be in part linked to their desire to see renewed U.S. military civil affairs projects in northern Djibouti. END COMMENT.)

¶11. (C) Daoud reinforced the request for civil affairs programming in northern Djibouti. (NOTE. After the breakout of hostilities in the Djibouti-Eritrea border dispute in June 2008, Djiboutian CHOD Major General Fathi officially prohibited U.S. military civil affairs programs in northern Djibouti due to border-related security concerns. END NOTE). In response, Ambassador highlighted current USAID and Special Self-Help projects still underway in northern areas, and emphasized that while the USG and U.S. military remained willing to work throughout the country, we would respect the GODJ's guidelines on where civil affairs projects could be carried out.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) As a respected former opposition leader and the head of the RPP's most influential ally, Daoud is in a unique but delicate position. While responding to his largely ethnic-Afar constituency's fears about unequal economic distribution and any hint of growth in Somali-led political dominance, he must also continue to convince the RPP that the moderate FRUD branch is a reliable, peaceful, and irreplaceable partner. As discussions on possible constitutional reforms deepen, Daoud and the FRUD may well push for more and higher level representation-perhaps the Vice Presidency, Prime Ministry, or more ministerial and parliamentary positions-as a quid pro quo for supporting a third term for President Guelleh. While Djibouti remains a pocket of stability in the Horn of Africa, the unusual recent uptick in youth gang violence in Djibouti City and the mine incidents and other actions of small armed bands in remote areas of the north bear careful

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monitoring. END COMMENT.
SWAN